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ABSTRACT

Dudley A. Sargent, M.D., was Director of the Hemenway Gymnasium at Harvard University for 1879 to 1919. For the first ten years he was also an Assistant Professor of Physical Training. In 1889, President Eliot recommended that Dr. Sargent be promoted to full professor. In an unprecedented action the Board of Overseers rejected Eliot's recommendation and stripped Sargent of his faculty status altogether. This action was due primarily to Sargent's participation on the first Faculty Athletic Committee which established the first regulations for Harvard athletes and banned football for one year because of its roughness and violence. These actions antagonized the younger alumni but also displeased some of the older alumni and faculty who fought to eliminate all sports. This paper, writtnen in the first person singular, as if it were Sargent himself writing, presents the views of Dr. Sargent on a number of topics such as the aims of physical education, physical education in the elementary schools, secondary schools, and universities, activities for adults and women, problems of intercollegiate athletics, and the place of physical education in general education. These views are taken directly from the writings and speeches of Dr. Sargent over a period of 35 years. (SP)

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by Bruce L. Bennett
Ohio State University

A paper to be presented at the Centennial Convention of AAHPERD, April 17, 1985 to the joint meeting of the History Academy and the Philosophy Academy.

I have just come over from my office at Harvard University where I finished my examination of Joseph Knowles. Some of you know that I have made it a practice over the years of examining and testing not only students at Harvard and my normal school but also a number of outstanding athletes and performers. These have included Annette Kellerman, the famous swimmer; Eugene Sandow, the Prussian strong man; and John L. Sullivan, the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. I might add that many of my colleagues at Harvard have taken a dim view of my testing people of this kind and feel that it brings no credit to the University. If the persons who seem disposed to criticize my conduct would be a little more discriminate and occasionally see something to approve, I should have more respect for their opinions but inasmuch as everything that I have done since my connection with the University from the introduction of the new system of apparatus, cards, charts, photographs, examinations, summer school, etc.--to my personal efforts in trying to check the evil tendencies of athletics have all been "protested against" and "objected to"--it leaves me somewhat in doubt both as to the wisdom that evolved the criticism and the motive that prompted it.

But to get back to Joseph Knowles. If you have been reading the Boston newspapers, you will know that Knowles is the person who wanted to prove that man can survive in Nature on his own. He therefore went into the remote woods of Maine near the Canadian border for two months. He had no knife or matches or other implements, and he entered the woods with no food or water or clothes--and I mean no hat, no coat, no shoes, no socks, no gloves, no shirt, no trousers,

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no underwear, no nothing. He was, in truth, stark naked. He had no contact with any human being during that time. Knowles not only survived the experience, but according to my examination of him today compared with my examination before he went in, he is actually in better health. He has lost 11 pounds, his height has increased one-tenth of an inch, the capacity of his lungs has increased 45 cubic inches which is positively amazing, his chest has gained an inch and a half, and his waist has decreased two inches. Using the strength tests at Harvard, he tested 876 points before going into the woods and 954 today, a phenomenal increase of 78 points. This score is better than the top scores of the football players or crew members. He is in the pink of condition. His scientific experiment shows what a man can do when he is deprived of luxuries which many people have come to regard as necessities.

I am particularly glad to have this opportunity to speak at a professional meeting. You know there are some people in our profession who consider going to meetings as a waste of time. But, in my opinion, a teacher should know enough about all exercises to use them for what they are worth without fear or prejudice. As a matter of fact, there is hardly any sport or game that has ever been brought to the attention of the public or any exercise that has ever been advocated that has not some value. No one, who is not afflicted with the insanity of conceit, can think for a moment that a body of men, who have been working along certain lines of physical training for years, will not have acquired knowledge and experiences that those working along different lines of the same training have missed, though they in turn may have made other discoveries, and acquired other experiences that are equally valuable. It is the sense of the limitations that surround the individual investigator that should make us anxious to compare our ideas and exchange our experiences.

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In fact, I have always supposed that was the object of an association. And here I must beg to remind those who are opposed to the practical exhibits, that the larger portion of the members of the association are actually earning their salaries by teaching physical exercises, and not by talking and theorizing about them. The papers, however interesting to hear, can always be read and re-read in the official report, but the practical exercises can only be seen to be appreciated. In my opinion, both the theory and practice should be carried along together.

Our major problem today is to place the training of the body upon the same educational basis as the training of the intellect, believing that this is the only rational way to meet the excesses and abuses of athleticism and to encourage the attainment of the highest ideals in mental and physical development. Some of our best and greatest thinkers, while admitting the value of physical exercise as an agent of health, still doubt the expediency of making it a department of education. But when it shall be generally known that the object of muscular exercise is not to develop muscle only, but to increase the functional capacity of the organs of respiration, circulation, and nutrition; not to gain in physical endurance merely, but to augment the working power of the brain; not to attain bodily health and beauty alone, but to break up morbid mental tendencies, to dispel the gloomy shadows of despondency, and to insure serenity of spirit; when men shall have learned that much of the ill-temper, malevolence, and uncharitableness which pervade society arises from feeble health, and that the great mental and moral disturbances which sometimes threaten the stability of a government may be traced to physical causes, then will the training of the body rival in dignity and importance the training of the mind, for the interests of mind and body will be recognized

as inseparable. The highest ideal for physical training is the improvement of the individual man or woman in structure and function. The great thing to be desired and attained is that prime physical condition called fitness--fitness for work, fitness for play, fitness for anything a man may be called upon to do. Neither the physiological, psychological, sociological, nor educational value of physical training is in proportion to the distance one can run, swim, or throw a weight, or the height to which he can jump or from which he can dive. What our American students of today should strive for is neither to be victorious athletes, prize gymnasts, nor champion strong men, but to have some of the strength of the strong man, some of the alertness and endurance of the athlete, and some of the grace and skill of the gymnast, all combined with the poise and dignity of the gentleman.

As we gather here for our meetings let us remember that to condemn a thing simply because it is old or to recommend it simply because it is new, is not the best way to advance our cause. Read into physical education everything you can of the slightest value but don't read out of it the most fundamental thing of all--that is, all-round muscular exercise.

As a preliminary step to a sane consideration of physical education in the colleges, the subject must receive the necessary attention in the elementary and preparatory schools. Here children must be allowed more freedom of movement--to run, jump, climb, swim, dive, skate and play. This is the age in which the elementary work in the so-called heavy gymnastics should be begun, and every effort made to teach children the correct way of doing things which they naturally like to do. So in regard to group or class gymnastics: select those exercises which children most delight in, and then get them to imitate the instructor as to the accuracy, order, rhythm and harmony of the movements.

Music should be used with the class exercises, not only as an accompaniment and an aid to the instructor, but as an excellent method of teaching the art of music itself. Following these activities in order of educational progressions should come spoken and written exercises concerning them. If the instructor can read into these youthful physical activities the elementary principles and lessons of history, biology, botany, physics, chemistry, hygiene, etc., so much the greater hold he will have upon the attention of his pupils, and the more he will advance the cause, not only of physical education, but of education in general. These exercises need to be supplemented by well-regulated plays and games at recess time. The teacher has the task of interpreting the rules, encouraging the weak and timid, restraining the strong and overbearing, recognizing merit, and frowning on dishonesty and unfairness.

The work begun in the elementary schools should be carried on progressively through the secondary schools. Taking advantage of the boy's innate desire at this time to test his strength and courage and do those things that become a man, every effort should be made to enrich the routine work in gymnastics and physical training by the introduction of group contests, antagonistic exercises, and field, track and water sports and games. The ability and character of the men chosen for physical instructors during the secondary-school period should be superior to that of any other instructor because they can exert more influence for good or evil at this time than any other member of the teaching staff. As this is the period when the boy's character as well as his physique is forming, every effort should be made by the governing body of the school to apply the teachings of the classroom and lecture hall in hygiene, ethics, economics, religion, etc., to the practice of the field, track and gymnasium.

The long and careful training, the rough and strenuous games, the hard, exacting and exciting contests of our student athletes all afford the best possible opportunity for rooting into conduct and character the basic principles of self-government and civic righteousness. And will our secondary school authorities have the good sense to realize that athletics cannot be eliminated from school life and to unite with others in trying to check the abuses and direct the uses of this important adjunct in education?

When a boy comes to college, he should enter well trained in body as well as in mind. Some of us believe it is more to the credit of a university to have one hundred men who can do a creditable performance in running, rowing, ball-playing, etc., than to have one man who can break a record, or a team that can always win the championship. The great aim of the gymnasium is to improve the physical condition of the mass of our students, and to give them as much health, strength, and stamina as possible, to enable them to perform the duties that await them after leaving college. The aim of many of us for years has been to have gymnastics and athletics conducted largely for the benefit of the performer, rather than for the amusement of the spectator. The real benefit to the individual from exercise and sport comes from actual participation in them, not simply from witnessing the efforts of others. The colleges should make every effort to broaden their facilities for the practice of many sports by many students, instead of intensifying their interest in a few sports which can be practiced only by experts. Harvard and some other colleges have been working towards this policy for many years, and, though it has not always brought victory to their student athletes, it has brought health, strength and an improved physique to thousands of their athletic students. Many of us have

thought that this was what the alumni and friends of education in their serious moments most desired. This is the only compensation that should enhance the joy of victory or allay the chagrin of defeat. If five percent of the students in our universities can carry their athletics to excess and still do intellectual work enough to entitle them to a degree, it is hardly just to infer that the remaining ninety-five percent would be less likely to attain as high a standard of scholarship if they were encouraged to take physical exercise enough to keep them in good working condition.

When the college authorities throughout the land recognize the latent possibilities in athletics properly conducted and restricted as a department in education, and when college students recognize the significance of mental training as well as physical training as a preparation for their life's work, this practical recognition of the unity of mind and body will make for the unity of college education in general. In other words, both parties will realize that it is the whole man that is to be educated, and that the college as a whole must assume the responsibility for the job.

Let me emphasize at this point that our responsibility does not end with the college-age person. A notion prevails in our country that men of middle age are too old to exercise in the gymnasium, and that they sacrifice their dignity in engaging in boyish sport. There is no time in life when well regulated and judicious exercise is more serviceable to a man than between forty and fifty years of age.

I should make clear that what I have said so far applies equally to women as well as men. Competitive games, normally played and sanely regulated, are just as beneficial for women as for men. They stimulate interest, create the

desire to equal and excel in sports—an ambition which implies practice and preparation—and in the end they do more to encourage physical development than any other factor in the curriculum of physical culture. In 1896 I declared that basketball is to our women what football is to men, and it is destined to be very popular and have a wide influence in molding character. We have seen this prediction come true. What I just said for older men is true for women. The best thing is for women to keep up their participation in sports such as archery, bicycling, bowling, canoeing, croquet, golf, rowing, fishing, and sailing. Overweight women should reduce food intake, not sleep more than seven or eight hours, wear light clothing, get lots of fresh air. Eternal vigilance is the price of anti-fat.

Let us now look at the college athletic scene. There is no doubt but that the dominating motive back of all our school and college athletics today is to secure victory or a series of victories over rival teams. This concrete aim undoubtedly furnishes a great many students with an incentive to physical activity and the adoption of regular habits of living. It also furnishes a much larger group of men with some open-air recreations and amusements in going to the field and the river to witness the athletic efforts of others. If the desire for victory could be kept within bounds, there would be no objection to it as an incentive to the practice of athletics. But poor human nature seems no stronger today than it was three thousand years ago. The legitimate love of approbation has been so magnified by personal adulation, newspaper notoriety and public interest that an athletic victory seems to our youth the only thing in physical education worth striving for. The intense rivalry and keen competition that have been engendered by making victory the prime motive in athletics

have resulted in many of the evils with which many of our colleges are now beset. These may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The greatly increased cost of training.

2. The increasing amount of time now given to practice.

3. The tendency to reduce the number of active competitors.

4. The continued violation of the laws of amateur sport.

5. The temptation to import players who have no legitimate connection with the school or college.

6. Depriving the non-athletic class of a sufficient incentive to physical exercises.

7. Arousing the spirit of antagonism and fostering viciousness and brutality.

8. Depriving the athletic sports of their efficiency as a means of health.

These are the prevailing evils and professional tendencies which led to the downfall of athletics in ancient Greece; they are the evils which prejudiced the church fathers against all kinds of physical training; they are the evils which have been continually pointed out to our students for the past 25 years.

Our present method of competition leads to madness and destruction. We have allowed the fighting impulse, represented by the spectacular side of athletics to get the better of the educational and developmental side. In other words we have lost control. We have forgotten that the grand aim of all muscular activity <u>from an educational point of view</u> is to improve conduct and develop character. But with all the injury caused by college sports today, I am prepared to contend that they do a great deal more good than harm. The

problem is how to preserve the good and lessen the evils. At the time that football was banned at Harvard University for one year in 1885, I wrote: "We believe that football, played in the proper spirit, under proper conditions, may be one of the most valuable of college sports, and we should deprecate its permanent loss. We have grounds for hope that means may be devised to make it a credit, in place of a disgrace to the university."

My position at that time as a member of the Faculty Athletic Committee, which suspended intercollegiate football for one year, was without doubt the reason why I lost my faculty status in 1889. This action by the committee antagonized many of the younger alumni and students. At the same time some of the older, conservative alumni and faculty wanted to abolish intercollegiate sports altogether. When I came up for reappointment in 1889 after ten years as an assistant professor, President Eliot and the Corporation recommended my appointment as a full professor of physical training. But the Board of Overseers, who are elected by the alumni, took the almost unprecedented action of rejecting this appointment, and my only title since that time has been Director of Hemenway Gymnasium. In depriving me of my faculty status, I could never again serve on any faculty athletic committee or have any voice in intercollegiate affairs. From the nature of my non-faculty position, I have been obliged to refrain from bringing my department forward, and from expressing any opinions upon the technical subjects in which I am supposed to be an authority, simply because the advancement of these opinions would have brought me into conflict with the athletic authorities of the university. As Baron de Coubertin stated some years ago, the chief function of the Director of Hemenway Gymnasium seems to be to examine students as a veterinary surgeon examines

horses, and then to turn them over to professional trainers to exploit on the race track. I resent this loss of faculty status bitterly because I had thrown myself into the athletic controversy without regard to personal interests, I had turned over to others a fortune in my apparatus, and I sacrificed my domestic happiness for duty and principle. Some of you may not know that Mrs. Sargent and I have separated, amicably I am glad to say, and through no fault of hers. I have simply been unwilling to give up time from my professional interests and activities to be a good husband and father.

And so, friends, the battle for sound physical education as an equal partner in the education of our children and youth continues. The battle is not yet won. It is for you who are young and vigorous and full of courage and enthusiasm to carry on the struggle, realizing as you must that if you meet with any degree of success, you are sure to do good to your fellow men. If you enjoy the work half as much as I have, you will find in it a cause for which you may well care to live, or dare to die.

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